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THE GULL
MONTHLY BULLETIN

AUDUBON ASSOCIATION OF THE PACIFIC

VOLUME 9 SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA, JANUARY, 1927 NUMBER 1

JANUARY (10TH ANNUAL) MEETING: The next regular meeting of the Association will be held on Thursday evening, 13th inst., at eight o'clock, in the Board Room of the State Board of Harbor Commissioners, Ferry Building, 2nd Floor, Room 19.

Annual reports will be presented and officers and directors elected for the coming year. It is hoped that there will be a large attendance of members.

The speaker of the evening will be Dr. Sterling Bunnell, who has chosen for his subject, "How Birds Fly." As there is a lot to learn about the commonplace occurrence of flying the discourse will undoubtedly open new channels of thought.

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JANUARY FIELD TRIP will be the usual visit to the wild waterfowl sanctuary at Lake Merritt, Oakland. It will be taken on Sunday, January 16th. San Francisco members will take Key Route boat at 9:00 a. m. and the Grand Avenue car on 22nd Street train at the mole, leaving the car at Grand Avenue and Perkins Street, where the party will form at 9:45 a. m. and proceed to the enclosure on the nearby lake shore, to witness the feeding of the wild fowl at 10:00 a. m.

East Bay members will transfer from any Traction main line to Grand Avenue or Lakeshore Avenue cars, which will take them to the above mentioned point.

The main object of the trip is to study waterfowl, of which intimate views are easily obtained. Some incidental land birds are always found. Formerly the party continued up Trestle Glen in the afternoon. Since there has been so much building activity in this locality birding is not so pleasant, but those who would like to bring their lunches will probably be repaid by following the old route, not only for the birds that will be encountered, but also for the opportunity of noting the change in bird life since man's encroachment in the Glen.

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE DECEMBER MEETING: The one hundred-seventeenth regular meeting of the Association was held December 9th, in the Board Room of the State Board of Harbor Commissioners, with Mr. Carl Smith, President, in the chair; Mr. Parry, Secretary, present.

Miss M. E. McLellan, Assistant Curator at the California Academy of Sciences, gave the address for the evening, speaking on "A Day With the Birds at Camp Humphrey, Virginia."

In view of the articles that appeared in the GULL for the months of October and November concerning Eastern birding conditions, it is interesting to have Miss McLellan also say that she was surprised to find so much land in the extreme East where the population is dense, that afforded such excellent cover and food for many species of birds. Here the forests of hardwoods, thickets of rhododendron and kalmia (laurel) and blackberry, to-

gether with weed interspaces and plenty of water, leave little to be asked for. As she states, "Even into the suburbs of Washington, roadsides were bordered with wild growth, and the country as a whole was enveloped in greenery. Then, too, in Washington where so many bureaus and institutions dealing with bird life are located, there are many observers and much printed material available to familiarize oneself with the birds to be found in that region. The most important treatise is 'Avifauna Columbia,' by Coues and Prentiss, issued in 1861 and republished as a Bulletin of the U. S. Natural Museum in 1883. Prof. Cooke published data on the subject and his daughter assembled all the known records in a paper published in 1921. Coues' first paper recorded 225 species, resident and migrant, in Washington. Miss Cooke has brought the number up to 299 and 2 hybrids and 2 hypothetical. Birds considered by Coues as rare are now known to be of common occurrence. Others abundant in 1861 are practically extinct. The hawks and owls are in the latter class. Virginia has waged a serious war of extermination against raptorial birds, regardless of species, so that at the present time hawks and owls are rarely seen."

NORTH LAKE

This artificial body of water lies opposite the 43rd Avenue entrance to Golden Gate Park and forms a refuge for the greatest number of birds of any lake in the park, especially waterfowl. Some years ago my curiosity was aroused by seeing a single specimen of the Sora rail at this lake while on an Audubon field trip, but it was not until this fall that I became interested enough to take the time to acquaint myself (or try to) with the above bird. After several long cold vigils which only resulted in a few fleeting glimpses of this shy creature my efforts were rewarded on the evening of December 5th. I arrived at the lake about four o'clock. There were quite a number of people present. The old dead tree in the upper end of the lake was simply filled with robins who, for a wonder, were quiet. This tree is supposed to be the undisputed night roost of hundreds of Brewer blackbirds.

Some three hundred California Gulls were following their queer custom of coming to fresh water to bathe. Mallard ducks predominated in numbers, with a few canvasbacks and ruddies with their woodpecker-like tail, only in reversed position, were present. The noisy coot and an occasional pied-billed grebe occupied the water.

I chose a seat at the point of the lake farthest north and waited. Soon the people began to leave and it became noticeable that the number of gulls was decreasing. They were going to their respective homes somewhere about the salt water.

The rat that lives in a hole in the bank swam out until it reached the limbs of a tree that dipped into the water and came ashore to forage around and under the rustic bench where I was seated.

The song sparrows and nuttalls swarmed about and a salt marsh yellow-throat came to the ground near me, the only one I have ever seen on land. By this time the west showed only a red glow and two rabbits paid me a visit, one cuddling against my foot and soon I could feel the warmth through my shoe. The lake was high owing to the recent rains and from where I sat to the water's edge was about eight feet, which is covered with sedge and other aquatic plants about two feet high.

Occasionally through the last hour of my vigil, I detected movements in the sedge. They were ever so slight and they could not be made by a song sparrow or yellow-throat and there was no wind. Suddenly there came to my ears, "Ker-wee, ker-wee," followed by a whistle or gasp for breath, and there was no mistake—a rail was almost at my feet.

It now was so dark that the lily pads were my only hope and in a few seconds out stalked this diminutive dodger of the sun, whose legs seemed several times too long for its body. It stalked about on the lily pads without causing a ripple on the water, and if one would take into consideration the length of its toes compared to its weight it does not seem strange. There it was running back and forth seemingly trying to catch some winged insect, now stopping and turning over a leaf and feeding greedily, evidently on snails which it found and knew were there.

Three times the call note was repeated and each time answered by several of its kind, which confirmed my suspicions that North Lake is the home of a fair number of Sora rail.

CARL R. SMITH.

* * *

Last August in the high Sierras I was much struck by the wide distribution of a few of our permanent resident birds.

A small flock of Brewer blackbirds were seen above timberline on Mt. Whitney, above Crabtree Meadows. They were not travel-worn but looked glossy and well fed.

In Lost Canyon, Tulare County, at 10,000 feet, were a sparrow hawk and red-shafted flicker. I saw both these species several times at high altitudes. On coming down from the mountains almost the first bird I saw was a sparrow hawk above the floor of the San Joaquin Valley. I thought, from a sparrow hawk's point of view, is there much difference between an expanse of granite and an expanse of stubble? Is it possible that he goes up to the peaks and canyons for cold nights, for the temperature was at 23° Fahrenheit that morning in Lost Canyon.

In August, 1924, on Palisade Creek, 8,500 feet, I noticed some small yellow birds in the willows. Soon they came out into the open to feed on some composites and proved to be green-backed goldfinches.

The Western red-tailed hawk was seen often. He appears to scorn all contrasts of altitudes and climates.

CORNELIA C. PRINGLE.

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DECEMBER FIELD TRIP was taken on Sunday the twelfth, to Golden Gate Park. Miss Pringle was in charge. The party entered at Forty-third Street and followed the usual course, visiting the two northerly lakes, then Spreckels, Lloyd, and Stow Lakes, in the order named. After lunch, which was eaten at the Japanese Tea Gardens, the members dispersed, some to attend the lecture at the Academy of Sciences, others to complete the circuit of Stow Lake.

The weather was warm and sunny and a very satisfactory list of birds was secured. Almost exactly half of the species were winter visitants. Of these the most interesting were the varied thrushes (only two of which were seen) and the say phoebe. Although not an unexpected occurrence, the phoebe has not previously been reported from the park. It was perched on a low post in the buffalo paddock and appeared very similar to the black phoebe, both in size and behavior. The brown and russet coloration, the slightly greater length, and the more slender silhouette readily distinguish it, however, from that species.

Several large aggregations of birds were encountered, thus affording a splendid opportunity for the study of the habitat preferences of certain species. A mulch of straw and barnyard manure near Second Lake was very thickly populated. English, nuttall, golden-crowned, song and fox sparrows foraged for waste grain, while such species as Vigors wren and Audubon warbler were attracted by the hordes of insects hovering above. Even the yellow-throat, finding here an abundant food supply, had wandered an unusual distance from the lakeside shrubbery. The wet meadows of the buffalo

paddock were preferred by robins, pipits, and killdeer, while a large flock of coots found the sheep pasture just to their liking.

The distribution of ducks, according to species, on the various lakes of the park was also an interesting habitat problem. Influencing factors are, in part, of course, the presence or absence of plants for shelter, the amount and kind of food available, and the depth of the water. The flock of ring-necked ducks which has been seen on North Lake every winter for the past five or six years was again in evidence. Half a dozen others were seen on Lloyd Lake. Lesser scaups, which are closely related, were observed only on Stow Lake, but were here present in fair numbers. A few bufflehead had also chosen Stow Lake as headquarters. Two males, quietly floating near the upper end of the lake, were the objects of much admiration. Seen at close range the beauty of their black and white costume was greatly enhanced by the iridescent blue and green on the head. Spreckels Lake was occupied by a large flock of canvasbacks and a somewhat smaller flock of ruddies. These latter were the least fastidious of all the species, being found in moderate numbers on every lake visited. Mallards, also, were very generally distributed, but were absent from Spreckels Lake. At Second Lake a large flock, with males predominating, gave an unusually favorable opportunity for the appreciation of their brilliant color when they suddenly emerged from the shrubbery and swam into open water in full view of the assembled company. With the exception of the mallards, the lakes were much better patronized by the divers than by the surface feeders. Stow and North Lakes boasted one pintail each, and Second Lake harbored a few baldpates. No adult males of either of these species were seen.

Birds encountered were: Eared and pied-billed grebes; glaucous-winged, California, and ring-billed gulls; mallard, baldpate, pin-tail, canvasback, lesser scaup, ring-necked, bufflehead, and ruddy ducks; coot, killdeer, California quail, red-shafted flicker, Anna hummingbird, say and black phoebes; purple finch, linnet, English, nuttall, golden-crowned, song and fox sparrows; Sierra junco, San Francisco towhee, Audubon and Townsend warblers; saltmarsh yellow-throat, American pipit, vigors wren, Santa Cruz chickadee, Coast bush-tit, western ruby-crowned kinglet, dwarf hermit and varied thrushes, and western robin. Introduced species observed at Stow Lake were: Natives—Canada, Hutchins, cackling and white-fronted geese, whistling swan, and white pelican. Exotics—Pekin and muscovy ducks, mute and black swans. Forty-nine species.

Members in attendance were: Misses Werner, Cockefair, Ayer, Gunn, Ames, Shroeder, Stevens, Boegle, Petit, Pringle, Haefner, Crum; Mesdames Parry, Myer, Baylor, Kibbe; Messrs. Parry, Myer, Bryant, Smith. As guests: Miss Stock, Miss Carnahan, Miss Breu, Miss Howitt, Dr. Card; Scouts Goldstone, Jacobs, Davis, Juda. Twenty members and nine guests.

ETHEL CRUM.

AUDUBON ASSOCIATION OF THE PACIFIC

FOR THE STUDY AND THE PROTECTION OF BIRDS

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Meets second Thursday of each month at 8:00 p.m., in the Board Room of the State Board of Harbor Commissioners, Ferry Building, Second Floor, Room 19.

Address Bulletin correspondence to President.

Subscription to Bulletin alone, 35c. per year. Membership dues, payable January 1, $3.00 per year.